

## **GAZETTE OPINION: STATE MUST ACT TO OFFSET CLIMATE CHANGE**

Decades ago, Montana's forest and agricultural land offset its carbon emissions. Not anymore. CO<sub>2</sub> generation is increasing rapidly. If no action is taken, Montana's gross greenhouse gas emissions are projected to increase by 31 percent from its 1990 level by 2020.

Those statistics are noted in a draft report from the Montana Climate Change Advisory Committee established by Gov. Brian Schweitzer. For most of the past year, this panel of 18 Montanans, including state legislators, home builders, agriculture producers, labor unions, energy producers and environmental advocates, has been developing a Climate Change Action Plan. In a draft of its report to the governor, the committee lists 55 recommendations for conserving energy, making cleaner fuels and reducing carbon dioxide output. The draft is expected to be finalized in a conference call meeting this week and presented to Schweitzer later this month.

The recommendations are timely. The daily news brims with climate change challenges. Last week, for example, Schweitzer and Great Falls community leaders met with U.S. Air Force representatives about the idea of constructing a coal-to-liquids plant at Malmstrom Air Force Base. Such a plant could produce a domestic source of fuel from Montana's abundant coal supplies while also creating 1,000 jobs in the region.

The Climate Change Advisory Committee draft includes a recommendation that: "Montana should require that any future coal-to-liquids refineries capture and store CO<sub>2</sub> from the start of operations and co-fire some fraction of biomass."

Another draft recommendation addresses biodiesel: "Montana should produce sufficient biodiesel from Montana feedstocks to meet 2, 10 and 20 percent of 2004 levels of Montana petroleum diesel consumption by 2020."

Tuesday night the Billings City Council will be asked to approve a contract for the 520,000 gallons of diesel fuel city vehicles will need for the next year. Although the city solicited bids for biodiesel as well, the cost was higher so the city staff is recommending regular diesel and the lowest bidder. That's the same recommendation the council received last year. We again call on the council to start a pilot project using biodiesel. Montana's largest city needs to get ready for 21st century energy alternatives.

Elsewhere on this page, a Billings writer argues that the city should start using biodiesel. And in another guest opinion, Montana insurance commissioner John Morrison and his Florida counterpart detail how climate change is affecting the cost and availability of property insurance.

Climate change is a real problem that demands changes from all of us. As the advisory committee's draft recommendations indicate, some answers are easy, others are hard. Individuals, governments and businesses must collaborate to reduce human impact on Earth's climate. Montanans cannot afford to do otherwise.